DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 383 066 EA 026 718

AUTHOR	Clinchy, Evans; Kolb, Frances Arick, Ed.
TITLE	Planning for Schools of Choice: Achieving Equity and Excellence, Book III--Model Choice Schools: Traditional Organization and Curriculum.
INSTITUTION	NETWORK, Inc., Andover, MA.
SPONS AGENCY	Department of Education, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	May 91
NOTE	43p.; For other books in the series, see ED 311 524, ED 321 348, and EA 026 719.
AVAILABLE FROM	The NETWORK, Inc., 300 Brickstone Square, Suite 900, Andover, MA 01810.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Access to Education; Educational Innovation; Educational Philosophy; Elementary Secondary Education; Equal Education; *Magnet Schools; Nontraditional Education; *School Choice; School Desegregation; *Voluntary Desegregation

ABSTRACT

This document is the third in a series of handbooks designed to help educators who are considering controlled choice as a possible desegregation method. The document describes the educational philosophy, curriculum, teaching methods, school organization, and grading methods of traditionally organized schools. Four schools in the northeastern United States are presented as examples of this type of education. Three schools stress academic and traditional learning, and one school curriculum specializes in math and science. The schools include the Nathan Hale Magnet School (Boston, Massachusetts, Public Schools); Burncoat Preparatory Magnet School (Worcester, Massachusetts, Public Schools); Bridge Alternative Concept School (New York City Public Schools); and Isaac Newton School for Science and Mathematics (New York City Public Schools). The document also contains a checklist to determine whether schools use a traditional approach. The final chapter discusses some options for high schools of choice and describes a K-12 choice system. (LMI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 383 066

NEEA
NEW ENGLAND CENTER FOR EQUITY ASSISTANCE

Planning for Schools of Choice:

Achieving Equity and Excellence

Book III–Model Schools of Choice:

Traditional Organization and Curriculum

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

EA 026 718

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

PLANNING FOR SCHOOLS OF CHOICE: ACHIEVING EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE

BOOK III:

MODEL CHOICE SCHOOLS: TRADITIONAL ORGANIZATION AND CURRICULUM

by

Evans Clinchy
Senior Field Associate
The Institute for Responsive Education
Boston, MA

Edited by
Frances Arick Kolb
Associate Director
The New England Center for Equity Assistance
The NETWORK, Inc.
Andover, MA

May 1991

This booklet was prepared by the New England Center for Equity Assistance, under Grant #CFDA84.004D, funded by Title IV, Section 403, of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, U.S. Department of Education.

It is the policy of the New England Center for Equity Assistance and The NETWORK, Inc. not to discriminate in their educational programs, activities, or employment practices on the basis of race, language, sex, age, or handicapping condition, under the provisions of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; Title IX of the 1972 Educational Amendments; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; and the Education of all Handicapped Children Act of 1975.

© The NETWORK, Inc., 1991
For further information contact:
Publications Department
The NETWORK, Inc.
300 Brickstone Square, Suite 900
Andover, MA 01810
(508) 470-1080

Dedication

Frances Arick Kolb
1937-1991

This book is dedicated to the memory of Frances A. Kolb, who devoted her life and work to the belief that all children have the right to a quality education.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Material for these four volumes has been drawn from various sources, including Equity and Choice (Institute for Responsive Education) and A Consumer's Guide to Schools of Choice (Institute for Responsive Education). The research for preparing the school profiles in Books III and IV was supported by Dr. Charles Glenn and the Bureau of Educational Equity, Massachusetts State Department of Education. Other material is drawn from an IRE research project supported by the Secretary's Discretionary Fund, U.S. Department of Education.

People who have been particularly helpful in the preparation of this publication have been:

- Dr. Jacqueline P. Fields, and Raymond Rose, New England Center for Equity Assistance;
- Dr. Don Davies, President, Institute for Responsive Education;
- Owen Heleen, Vice-President, Institute for Responsive Education;
- George Tsapatsaris, Project Director for the Lowell (MA) Public Schools;
- Dr. Charles Glenn, Director, Bureau of Equal Educational Opportunity, Massachusetts State Department of Education;
- Roland Charpentier, Magnet School Coordinator for the Worcester (MA) Public Schools;
- James Wallace and Wilfred Houle of the Magnet Planning Office of the Fall River (MA) Public Schools;
- Peter Colleary and Margaret Gallagher of the Parent Information Center, Cambridge (MA) Public Schools;
- Seymour Fliegel, John Falco, and Mary Romer-Coleman of Community School District Four in New York City;
- Dr. Eugene Reville, Kenneth Echols, and Dr. Rae Rosen of the Buffalo (NY) Public Schools;
- Dr. Michael Alves and Dr. Charles V. Willie of the Harvard Graduate School of Education; and
- Jane Bell who designed the cover.

CONTENTS

PREFACE i

INTRODUCTION 1

I. THE ATTRIBUTES OF AN EFFECTIVE SCHOOL 3

Why a Choice System? 4

II. WHY PRACTITIONERS (AND PARENTS) MIGHT CHOOSE A TRADITIONAL SCHOOL 7

Educational Philosophy 7
The Curriculum 7
How Teachers Teach and Children Learn 7
How Traditional Schools Are Organized and Run 8
How Children Are Graded 8

III. TRADITIONAL SCHOOLS: THREE MODELS 9

Nathan Hale Magnet School, Boston, (MA) Public Schools 9
Burncoat Preparatory Magnet School, Worcester (MA) Public Schools 13
Bridge Alternative Concept School, Community School District Four, New York City Public Schools 14
Practitioner's Checklist 19

IV. TRADITIONAL SCHOOLS WITH CURRICULAR SPECIALTIES 21

Why Practitioners (and/or Parents) Might Choose This Kind of School 22
Isaac Newton School for Science and Mathematics, Community School District Four, New York City Public Schools 22

V. HIGH SCHOOLS AND THE NEED FOR K-12 OPTIONS 27

Restoring the Essentials: The Sizer Remedies 28
Restructuring High Schools for Choice:
Other Models 30
Steps in the Right Direction: Moving
Toward K-12 Options 30

Index 33

PREFACE

The New England Center for Equity Assistance, a project of The NETWORK, Inc., is pleased to publish *Planning for Schools of Choice: Achieving Equity and Excellence*, a series on controlled choice. The four books in the series are designed to aid school personnel who are considering controlled choice as a possible desegregation method. They will help educators to think about choice as a way of restructuring school systems and achieving desegregation, learn how to develop a choice plan for their district, and review the different kinds of school organizations that might be developed for schools in their district.

We are excited about controlled choice. It is a method of desegregation that is voluntary, empowers parents and school staff, and leads to new and exciting school organization and curriculum. It uses the best of the magnet school concept by making all schools "magnets" for student enrollment. It celebrates and encompasses the diversity found in American schools. Choice acknowledges that since all children are not alike nor learn in the same way, schools should vary. Further, parents and students should be able to choose the school they think most suitable for each child.

Parents have long shown a desire to choose the type of school their children attend. The quality of schools is one of the criteria they have used in selecting a neighborhood. They have enrolled their children in private and parochial schools; they have supported various types of education in their own school districts. They have stood in long lines or camped overnight to enroll their children in magnet schools. Children have made choices, too. Many, after all, choose not to attend school at all; they drop out. Some choose to go to exam schools or private schools. On the other hand, some parents have never had the luxury of making choices about the schools their children can attend. Because of poverty, illiteracy, or discrimination, they have been forced to send their children to schools that often are underfunded and inadequate. Choice, then, can be a means to empower all parents.

Choice alone, however, will not lead to desegregation of a school district. While choice may increase the comfort level of parents, students, and staff and may lead to improved schools, only *controlled* choice will also lead to desegregation. Based on the limited experience available at this time, its potential as a desegregation method is great. Through use of a system of controlled choice, three cities in Massachusetts -- Lowell, Fall River, and Cambridge -- have been able to increase the integration of their schools. In Cambridge, controlled choice has resulted in increased achievement levels of students from different schools. In Fall River and Lowell, a major change in the school environment is already evident, as is a significant increase in parental involvement.

Controlled choice has enormous potential as a means of restructuring schools so that they become racially, ethnically, and sexually integrated as well as high-quality, effective schools of which the community, students, and staff can be proud. This potential can only be realized, however, through a planning process that involves all elements of the community. Also, the school administration

must make a major commitment to diversity of school organization and curriculum and to school-based management.

These books, we hope, will be helpful to those who are interested in controlled choice and desegregation. We welcome comments and discussion of this method for school structure.

The author of this book is Evans Clinchy, senior field associate at the Institute for Responsive Education, Boston, MA. He has worked in the field of desegregation and public school choice for the past twenty years. He has assisted the communities of Indianapolis (IN), Chicago (IL), Stamford (CT), and the Massachusetts communities of Lowell, Worcester, and Fall River to develop desegregation remedies based upon parent and professional choice. He is a contributing editor of Equity and Choice, and has contributed major articles on choice to Phi Delta Kappan and other educational publications.

INTRODUCTION

Books III and IV of the Planning for Schools of Choice series describe the two distinct approaches to schooling that are most often found in choice schools. This book presents schools that have a traditional educational philosophy, curriculum, and school organization. Book IV describes schools that are less traditional, such as continuous progress schools, and some that are more nontraditional, such as open or developmental schools and Montessori schools.

Although the schools described in both books are schools of choice and are effective schools, these two distinct approaches or options are, to a large extent, mutually exclusive. That is, they are so distinctive and different in their basic assumptions about the process of schooling that, by and large, it would be difficult to combine them or to practice both of them at the same time.

Book III offers a description of the philosophy, curriculum, teaching methods, school organization, and grading methods of traditional schools. Four schools are presented as examples of this type of education. Three are traditional schools with a traditional curriculum and the fourth is a school that specializes in math and science. This book also contains a checklist that educators can use to assess whether schools are traditional in their approach. The final chapter discusses some options for high schools of choice and describes a K-12 choice system.

The four schools described in this guide were not selected because they are necessarily the best schools of their type -- although each of them is certainly an effective school -- but because they offer a fair and accurate representation of their particular approach to schooling.

I

THE ATTRIBUTES OF AN EFFECTIVE SCHOOL

"The single most important contribution education can make to a child's development is to help him [or her] toward a field where his [or her] talents best suit him [or her], where he [or she] will be satisfied and competent. . . . We should spend less time ranking children and more time helping them to identify their natural competencies and gifts and cultivate those. There are hundreds and hundreds of ways to succeed, and many, many different abilities that will help you get there."

-- Howard Gardner, Professor of Developmental Psychology, Harvard University Graduate School of Education, and Director of Project Spectrum, *New York Times*, November 9, 1986.

During the 1980s the American educational world was shaken by a movement for reform. Beginning as a critical review of the achievement of American students, it has turned into a movement to restructure American schooling in the 1990s. As critics have reviewed the outcomes of American education and found them wanting, efforts to restructure, rather than just improve, schools are growing. The controlled choice system described in the four books of this series is one method of restructuring that can lead to a more effective school system and higher student achievement.

The principles of controlled choice schools are similar to the ones educational researchers believe are key to more effective schools -- site-based management, a diversity of teaching methods, accountability at the individual school level, and increased parent participation in the education of their children.

All high-quality schools, whether traditional or nontraditional, share certain elements. Effective choice schools also display these qualities. In the context of educational equity, within which all schools of choice operate, some of these common attributes are:

1. All such schools are desegregated and therefore -- in most cases -- the student bodies are roughly representative of the total school population of the district. In most cases, such schools will and should be open to and serve students of all racial and ethnic groups and all income and achievement levels. Since parent choice is perhaps the most effective way of achieving desegregation, all student assignment policies and all admissions to schools of choice should be designed so that genuine student integration is guaranteed through parent choice.

2. All good schools teach the basic skills as well as the other usual curricular subjects. However, they may not teach these in a traditional way. In all probability, students, no matter what kind of school they attend, will have to pass tests to insure that they are achieving minimum standards of basic skills competency.

3. All good schools conform to some general curricular requirements or mandates set either by the state and/or by the local school board, such as, all students must learn about U.S. Constitution and how a democratic society works. But such requirements are kept to a minimum, so they will not interfere with the ability of individual schools of choice to establish their own educational philosophies and their own curricula and to practice their own approaches to teaching and learning.

In addition to these shared attributes, the research on effective schools over the past decade or so indicates that there are other elements that are shared by all effective schools and therefore all schools of choice. An effective school is defined as one in which poor and minority children achieve at the same *rate* as the school's more advantaged children. The research suggests that all effective schools share the following commonalities:

- the staff of the school have a strong commitment to the idea that all children, and particularly all poor and minority children, can and will learn;
- the school has a strong principal who acts as the educational leader of the school;
- the school has a safe and orderly environment enabling all teachers and students to concentrate on learning;
- the school has a strong program of parental involvement.

With these common characteristics as guidelines, the goal has become one of defining the full range of diverse and educationally legitimate schools that parents and practitioners will, in all likelihood, want in their public school systems, and of restructuring the school system to allow for these choices.

WHY A CHOICE SYSTEM?

The majority of public schools in this country are similar and have a basically traditional approach to education. Over the past decade, however, there has been a growing movement to provide not only parents, but also teachers and principals with a diversity of desegregated schools.

For parents, this means being able to choose the school or schools that they feel will provide the particular kind of schooling and, therefore, the particular kind of educational excellence, they want for their children. For teachers and principals, choice means the power to choose the kind of schooling they wish to practice and a school environment that will provide them with the greatest degree of professional satisfaction and reward.

The idea that a public school system should provide a range of different kinds of schools is not new. We have always known, for instance, that all children are individuals, with individual abilities and needs. Some children are good at some subjects and some kinds of educational activities and not so talented at others.

Some children enjoy and do well in a traditional school environment, in self-contained classrooms inhabited by a teacher and twenty-five other children of exactly the same age who are all learning the same thing at the same time. Some children learn their basic skills and progress in subjects quickly, while other children take a little more time to learn the same things, even though in the end they learn them just as well as the other children. Still some children find traditional environments too confining and learn better in schools that give them more control over what they learn and how they do it.

Parents also have liffering ideas about their children's education. Many parents want their children to have a traditional, old-fashioned education because they believe that is best. Other parents believe that schooling can and should provide other kinds of experiences. They want the opportunity to send their children to less traditional schools.

And just as children and parents differ in their response to schooling, so do the practitioners of public schooling -- the teachers and principals. Many teachers and principals believe in and feel comfortable working only in traditional, highly structured schools, while other teachers and principals find professional satisfaction when they are working in less traditional schools with nontraditional aims and methods.

What this appears to mean is that no single kind of public school, no single kind of curriculum or a single, standardized definition of educational excellence is going to be equally suitable for and equally satisfying to the wide diversity of parents and students served by our public schools or to the wide diversity of professional educators who work in those schools.

The recent manifestation of the idea of choice has come about primarily as a result of the alternative school movement that began in the 1960s and, more recently and directly, as a result of the creation of well over a thousand magnet schools established to respond to the need to desegregate our larger urban school systems. While all schools aim to teach children the basic skills -- the basic three Rs of reading, writing and mathematics -- each has a different educational philosophy, a different way of organizing itself, a different approach to teaching, and different ideas about the best way for children to learn and about what going to school is all about.

Indeed, it can be said that no school, existing or newly created, can operate without someone making or having made a set of decisions about each of the above areas. Although the people at an individual public school may not have thought consciously about each of the areas or, made deliberate decisions concerning them, those people exhibit the decisions they have made -- or decisions that the school system has made for them -- by the way they organize and operate their school.

Thus every public school expresses an educational philosophy, a particular view of how children can and should go about the task of learning. Each school has a fairly clear idea of what teachers should teach and children should learn (the curriculum the school offers) and a set of rules and regulations by which the school operates, including how the classes will be organized, how children will be grouped into those classes, what the disciplinary code will be, how the school will be governed, and so on.

Each of the different kinds of educationally legitimate schools, of course, is striving to achieve educational excellence. Each aims to be a good, high-quality school. Each wants its students to learn everything they need to learn to be successful both in school and later life. However, each school's leaders, teachers,

and parents do not agree on precisely how best to achieve these aims, and that is not only all right but very healthy for the education of children.

II

WHY PRACTITIONERS (AND PARENTS) MIGHT CHOOSE A TRADITIONAL SCHOOL

Teachers, principals, and parents who believe that schools should help students achieve the highest possible academic standards and become as proficient as possible in the basic skills of reading, writing, and mathematics, as well as in all other traditional academic subjects, such as science, social studies, music, and art, are likely to choose a traditional, back-to-basics school. They expect a school to provide its students with a thorough knowledge and understanding of the cultural and intellectual heritage of Western civilization and to build strong moral character in all students. Students will emerge from such a school with an understanding of, respect for, and commitment to the fundamental moral and ethical beliefs of the society in which they live.

But, most important, both practitioners and parents will want the school to ensure that its students are well prepared for academic high schools and for college. They feel an elementary school should give all its students a solid foundation in the basic academic skills and subjects, enabling them to get good grades in high school and to do well on college entrance exams and tests, such as the Scholastic Aptitude Tests.

EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

Most of these schools operate on the theory that, whatever degree of innate intellectual power children are endowed with at birth, this intelligence must be carefully trained and shaped by a highly structured school environment. As part of this highly structured environment, teachers instruct all students in a predetermined sequence of basic skills and traditional subject matter. Children are organized into classes either by age or by demonstrated ability and achievement levels. Children are expected to demonstrate mastery of the required basic skills and content of one level before moving to the next. In order to learn well and to acquire the necessary habits of self-discipline and proper behavior, the school provides a calm, orderly environment maintained by a code of school discipline understood by everyone in the school and administered in a fair and just manner by the principal and all other adults in the school.

Parents are asked to support the aims of the school by reinforcing the academic and disciplinary policies of the school at home and by supervising the children's homework.

THE CURRICULUM

In most traditional schools, the curriculum will be strongly academic and concentrate on the traditional and established subject areas: language arts (reading and writing), mathematics, science, social studies, art, music, physical education, and so on. In each of these subject areas, the school staff will agree on the material and the skills to be taught to students at each grade level.

HOW TEACHERS TEACH AND CHILDREN LEARN

In most traditional schools, all teaching/learning decisions are made by the school and the teachers. The curriculum is transmitted from teacher to students. Students are expected to understand and to learn from the teacher. They are

expected to listen carefully to what the teachers are saying, to answer questions when they are asked to do so, to complete all class and homework assignments, and to do as well as they possibly can on all tests.

HOW TRADITIONAL SCHOOLS ARE ORGANIZED AND RUN

All -- or most -- classes in traditional schools will be housed in a self-contained classroom with twenty to twenty-five children and one teacher who is responsible for teaching most subjects. In most traditional schools, the school day is divided into specified time segments or periods, with each period designated for the teaching of a particular subject. Students and teachers are expected to follow the schedule.

Students are organized into classes and are taught according to their chronological age. That is, all six year olds will be in first-grade classes, all seven year olds in second-grade classes, and so on. In such heterogenous grouping, children are not separated into different classes according to how well they are achieving. In some cases, teachers may divide classes into achievement level groups, at least for reading and math. In other traditional schools children are grouped homogeneously, that is, they will be placed in classes according to how well they are achieving. All of a particular grade level's high achieving children, for instance, will be placed in one class, the middle achievers in a second class, and the low achievers in a third class.

Any such organization will need to be carefully monitored to make sure that it does not lead to within-school segregation.

HOW CHILDREN ARE GRADED

In general, most traditional schools will carefully track each student's progress through frequent testing. These tests will most often be letter-graded. Usually the grades will be assigned on a bell-shaped curve. That is, it is expected (and the curriculum and tests are so arranged) that only a few students will get As, a few more will get Bs, the largest number of children will get Cs, a certain number of children will get Ds, and a few will be failures and receive Fs.

Thus, students are in competition with each other to do well and receive the highest grades. Each student's academic progress is determined by his or her grade on the tests. Students may also be graded on their degree of success in conforming to the school's behavior code. Grades are reported to parents on regular report cards that are sent home.

III

TRADITIONAL SCHOOLS: THREE MODELS

The three schools described below fit the pattern of a traditional school, not because of some tradition or past rules but because the staff has chosen to organize the school that way. The school has been structured as a traditional school because parents or staff desire it. All the students and staff are there because they believe this is an appropriate or perhaps the most appropriate way for children to learn. The Nathan Hale and Burncoat Preparatory Schools are magnet schools, and the Bridge School is an alternative school created by its teachers.

NATHAN HALE MAGNET SCHOOL BOSTON (MA) PUBLIC SCHOOLS

It is 8:45 A.M. on a cold but sunny day in the asphalt covered yard of the Nathan Hale Magnet School in the Roxbury section of Boston. The school, an ancient but massively solid building built in 1909, sits like a medieval castle on its hill in Roxbury's Fort Hill neighborhood. The school's children -- almost all 186 of them -- are getting off their yellow buses and milling around in the school yard, greeting friends and classmates. Mysteriously no pushing or shoving or anything that remotely resembles a fight occurs. A few adults are around, but they seem to have little to do.

Photo By Steve Semm

At about 9 A.M., the rear door to the school opens, and the children, guided only by a soft word or two from the adults, line up in rows according to their classes. They then move quietly into the building's basement food service area (the school has no cafeteria or gym), pick up their breakfast trays, and, still in quiet and orderly lines, move upstairs to their classrooms. There they eat their breakfasts (and later their hot lunches) and begin the day's classes.

If this routine of school children lining up in rows and moving through the halls in a quiet, orderly way strikes anyone as a bit old-fashioned, the staff at the Nathan Hale would not be surprised. A traditional, back-to-basics school is the kind of school they run and want to run, and the kind of school the parents who have chosen it want their children to attend.

The Hale is a small kindergarten through grade five school, housing its 186 children in one full day kindergarten, two first grades, two second grades, one third grade, two fourth grades and one fifth grade. The school enrollment is 58 percent African-American, 22 percent Hispanic-American, 2 percent Asian-American, and 17 percent white (there is one Native American child), or 82 percent minority. Seventy percent of the children are eligible for and receive free lunch and breakfast, and an additional 10 percent receive a reduced-price lunch. The teaching staff is also integrated -- five teachers are African-American, five white, one is Hispanic-American, and one Asian-American (Chinese, in this case).

The classes at the Hale are basically age-graded, that is, all five year olds are in the kindergarten, all six year olds in first grade, and so on. Each of these classes operates within the four walls of a traditional, self-contained classroom. By and large, each teacher handles the teaching of most of the traditional school subjects. According to Pasquale "Pat" Lochiatto, the school's principal for the past seven years, the classes are very much controlled and run by the teachers. This, he says, is as it should be in a school of this type.

The school's magnet theme is called "Academics Plus," by which the school means that it offers reading, writing, and mathematics plus enrichment in the arts, in the use of computers, and, of course, social studies and science. As a result of its additional state funding as a magnet school and its partnership with Wheelock College, the school is able to offer a Kodaly music program, a creative writing course, and special programs at the Museum of Fine Arts and the Museum of Science.

What was most striking on the first day of a two-day visit was the extraordinary atmosphere of calm and order that pervades the school. During the hours when children were supposed to be in their self-contained classrooms being taught, they were in their classrooms being taught. No children were wandering aimlessly through the corridors, and when they were in the halls moving from one school activity to another, there was no horsing around or poking each other in the ribs.

Yet it is perfectly clear that this is no jail. In the course of two days at the school, I never heard an adult raise his or her voice to a child -- not in a class, not in the hallways. Whatever the school's discipline code may or may not be, it was clear to me that every child and every adult in the school knew exactly how he or she was supposed to behave. And it was no big deal. Such good behavior seemed to be the natural condition at the school.

Indeed, Lochiatto informed me that in the seven years he has been principal of the school he has <u>never</u> suspended any pupil for a single day. "Here," he said, "the teachers and students work things out on their own. Everyone learns to resolve problems as they arise. Orderliness is just the ethos of the school. The children pick it up as soon as they get here. The teachers expect it, all of the children expect it -- particularly the older children -- and it just happens. I almost never get involved in having to solve a discipline problem."

* * *

On the school's second floor, the twenty-five children assigned to Jim Sullivan's fifth-grade class are coming into their classroom, walking in their usual quiet line. As they enter the classroom with its desks lined up in rows, they peel off and each student quietly takes his or her assigned seat.

Sullivan has taught in the Boston school system for twenty-seven years, the last eleven at the Hale. He begins his class by assigning a student to hand out pieces of yellow paper to everyone while he asks the class to get out their rulers. "Now," he says to the whole class, "how many parts are there to a fraction?" He goes around the class, selecting individual children to give an answer. "Four." Next child. "Two." Next child. "Twelve." Sullivan goes to the chalkboard and writes on it the word "fraction."

The class -- all twenty-five of them -- sit in rapt silence, hanging on his every word except when, in answer to one of his questions, some of them wildly wave their arms volunteering to answer. "What's a word," he says, "that sounds like fraction -- for instance, when you go the hospital?" "Fracture," says one child. "And what does fracture mean?" "It means you've broken something." "Right," says Sullivan.

He goes on to explain that a fraction is also something broken down into different parts. There are two kinds of fractions, he says, putting the names on the board, "common fractions" and "decimal fractions." "I'm going to give you some definitions, now," he says, "and I want you to write them on your paper."

He goes to the board again and writes, "A common fraction is a part of a whole." He then illustrates this with a story of a child with a candy bar who wants to share it equally with a friend. Where would the child have to "fracture" the bar so that each would have equal parts? "In the middle," says one student. "And how much would each of them have then?" he asks.

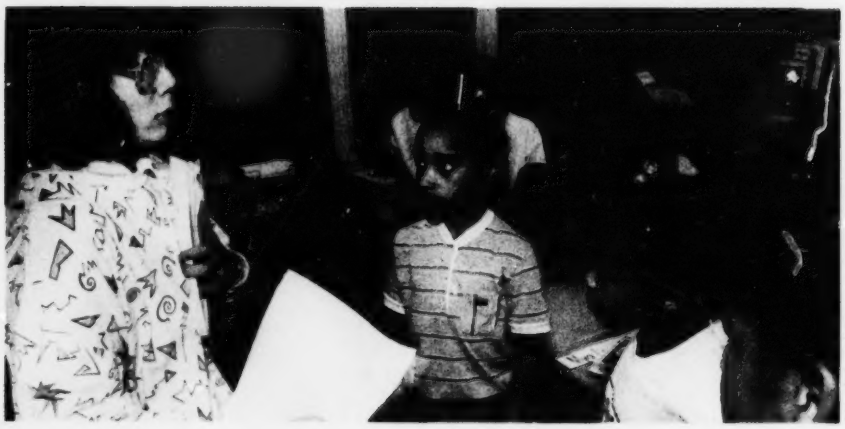

Photo By Steve Senne

From this teaching of a general definition of a fraction, Sullivan shows the various parts of fractions and their names and then questions students at a rapid pace to see if they understand. As the questions come faster and faster, the children get more and more excited and eager to answer.

Sullivan brings the lesson to an abrupt end and has the children move all the desks out of the way. Students line up in rows and do exercises, led by one of the boys. They touch their toes, arms up, arms down, and so on. Since the school lacks a gym, this is part of the

school's physical education program. The exercises are followed by a rapid game of "Simon Says," again led by several of the students.

Following the exercise period, Sullivan conducts a lesson in singulars and plurals, using the class's language arts textbook. The lesson involves changing sentences such as "the dog barked" into a plural "the dogs barked," but it also includes such nasty and nonsensical peculiarities of the English language as the plural of "knife." The end of the lesson is a written assignment, which the children do industriously and quietly at their desks. When they are finished, they bring their work up to Sullivan's desk.

There are several things about this class I find intriguing. First, *every* child is paying attention. I cannot remember the last class I visited where no child wasted time horsing around with his or her classmates and where the teacher never had to say, usually in a rather querulous voice, "Now, children, pay attention."

Perhaps even more surprising, the students genuinely seem to enjoy what they are doing. To most adults, I imagine, learning about fractions or plurals is not a fun activity. Yet Sullivan seems able to convince this roomful of twenty-five red-blooded American ten year olds that it is all one big game, and a game that they are eager to play.

* * *

In Caroline Chin's second-grade class, the desks and chairs are not lined up in rows but are gathered into small groups of eight to ten children. The room is brightly decorated with art work, stories by the children about famous African-Americans (including one by Dwayne Zografos on Matthew Henson, the first African-American to reach the North Pole) and a large, long poster reading "*Goong he fut choy*," which means "Happy New Year" in Chinese, a remnant of a Chinese New Year's celebration the class recently held.

Ms. Chin has the entire class deeply involved in the basic skills of addition and subtraction. She is doing this in what strikes me as a novel and creative fashion, a hands-on method using paper strips, one a set of small, one-inch strips, the other a set of strips each equaling ten of the smaller strips. These strips are combined and subtracted in order to answer addition and subtraction problems.

After this lesson goes on for fifteen or twenty minutes, Ms. Chin informs the class that they have done so well that they deserve to play a game of Math Bingo. Each card, instead of having a single number in each square, has an addition problem on it. When the numbers are called, the children must solve an addition problem in order to fill in the square. The children seem to think that this is great fun.

After the Bingo game, Ms. Chin tells me that this class is made up of seven-year-old second graders, except for two very advanced first graders who come into her class for math and reading. I remark how well behaved and attentive

the children seem to be. She claims there is no great mystery here. "I think we do build character and caring for each other here," she says. "It sometimes takes a while. Sometimes if two children start fighting, I put them off in a corner by themselves, sort of like jail, and the next time they try it, usually the other children step in and put a stop to it. They usually learn quite quickly. They don't like to be yelled at, and I don't like to yell. Sometimes if I come in with a headache, I'll tell them that and then they all take care of me."

BURNCOAT PREPARATORY MAGNET SCHOOL
WORCESTER (MA) PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Burncoat Prep, as the school is known throughout the city of Worcester, is a magnet school housing about 330 children from kindergarten through grade six. It was created in 1983 as one of the school system's first magnet schools.

Like the Nathan Hale School, Burncoat is a traditional, back-to-basics school that emphasizes the learning of basic skills and the traditional academic subjects. At one point, the parents involved in planning Burncoat wanted the school to be called Burncoat Preparatory Academy, to stress the traditional nature of the school and its similarity to a private prep school. The system administrators, however, thought that was carrying things a bit far and dropped the word academy.

Burncoat, like the Hale School, organizes its students and its classes primarily by age -- all or most fourth graders are in a fourth grade class with one teacher who teaches them all of the major academic subjects (with specialist teachers for such subjects as art and music). Within these age-graded classes, Burncoat takes a slightly different tack from the one practiced at Hale. In a typical class the children are divided into distinct groups based on their actual achievement levels. While the teacher works with one group of children, giving them a lesson appropriate to their achievement level, the other two groups of children will be doing assigned work in their seats.

* * *

In Jane Johnson's fourth-grade class at 9 A.M. one morning, twenty-three children are sitting at their desks, which are lined up in rows facing the chalkboard. Every desk has a child's name on it.

The room is crammed with a vast array of books and wall charts. There is also a fish tank, a TV set, and a stack of baskets (one for each child and containing that child's text and workbooks) in the back of the room. On one wall a large chart headed "Classroom Standards" lists such statements as: "We respect the rights of others. We follow directions. We stay in our seats. We raise our hands. We bring our pencils, books and homework to class."

The class is divided into three main groups -- higher, middle, and lower. Johnson sets up the higher-level group of twelve students (I'll call them "the Lizards" since that name is in the title of the book they are using) for the lesson they will be doing on their own. Although this is the class's reading period, the lesson they are working on involves the metric system. It is an example, Johnson tells me, of how the school tries to integrate its teaching of the various academic subjects.

"In this lesson," Johnson tells the group, "you'll be working on grams and pounds and litres and quarts. Now, these are thinking questions. You have to read each one carefully and look at the chart on page 17 and then think about what the right answer might be. For instance, what would weigh 50 grams?"

After she gives some examples, the Lizards settle down to work on their workbooks. Johnson now turns her attention to the middle group of seven children who are sitting at desks in the front of the room. This group will be working on another lesson that integrates reading, language arts, science, and mathematics.

"We're going to be talking about the origin of numbers," she tells the group, "and about mathematics, which is the study of numbers." She proceeds to tell them how the early astronomers used numbers to calculate the movements of the sun, moon, and planets, how the Chinese developed the abacus, and how all this led to mathematics and computers. She and the group then read Carl Sandburg's poem titled "Arithmetic" in which the first line is "Arithmetic is numbers that fly like pigeons out of your head."

During this lesson, the Lizards are for the most part working quietly at their desks. Occasionally one of them gets up and gets something out of his or her basket in the back of the room. Sometimes there is a fairly quiet conference between one or two students. Since they can clearly hear Johnson and the middle group in the front of the room, one of their main tasks is to ignore all that and to continue their own work. Although some students appear to be paying more attention to the action up front, for the most part they seem able to attend to their assignment.

BRIDGE ALTERNATIVE
CONCEPT SCHOOL
COMMUNITY SCHOOL
DISTRICT FOUR
NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC
SCHOOLS

The view from the fourth floor of P.S. 101 in the East Harlem section of New York City is not a view to inspire the soul. Directly across the street from the school there is a deserted lot full of rampant weeds and broken glass. On each side of the empty lot are burned out and abandoned tenement buildings. As I look out on this desolate scene, a young boy -- he appears to be about ten or eleven years old -- emerges from a boarded-up third-floor door of the building on my right and, looking furtively about, makes his way down a fire escape and out into the street. Michael Friedman, the tall, energetic director of the Bridge School, who is standing beside me, suggests that the youngster has just made a

drug score. In the building on the left, says Friedman, is a shooting gallery.

Photograph © Jane Menyawi

Drugs are only one of the problems faced every day by the people of East Harlem and the 13,000 kindergarten-through-grade-nine children and their teachers who attend the eighty schools of New York's District Four. The district is made up of almost entirely (roughly ninety percent) of African-American and Hispanic-American children, many of whom are recent immigrants and speak little or no English. Many -- if not most -- of the students in the district come from single-parent homes. Almost every child qualifies for a free lunch, and many are from welfare families.

In sociological terms, most of the children in the district fall within that segment of the population trapped in the classic cycle of poverty, welfare, dropping out of school, and thus functional illiteracy. For many of these children, the normal predictions are for a life of welfare dependence, teen-age pregnancy, drugs, crime, and often a short life.

And, says Friedman, it is precisely those predictions that the Bridge School and its parents are determined will never come to pass -- at least not for the 270 children grades six through nine entrusted to the school's care in the course of each year. As Friedman and I turn from the window and walk down the fourth floor's main corridor, some of what he is talking about and hoping for becomes a little clearer. The corridor has just been brightly painted in a soft beige color. As we move down the corridor, Friedman greets every child he meets with a wave and a grin, calling each of them by his or her first name.

Settled in his cramped office, Friedman begins to talk about what the school aims to achieve and what he thinks the school has accomplished in its ten years. "What we want to do here -- what we do do, I believe -- is to help the parents make sure that their children become good, honest, decent citizens," says Friedman. "We and their parents want them to become decent people, which is what the students who come here want to become and which is what the parents who send their children here want them to be."

Thus Friedman and the staff at Bridge are openly and unabashedly in the business of character building or, as the school's articulated educational philosophy puts it, the school's goal is "to provide a form of value education that will enable children to make moral or judgmental decisions based on what they have learned." And how, precisely, does the school go about building character?

"Well," says Friedman. "in the first place, we run a very strict, old-fashioned school but also, I think, a very humanized one. We have a very traditional curriculum -- reading, social studies, English, math, science, health and phys. ed., reading/literature, and art. But every student also takes courses in consumer education, law, career education, drug and alcohol abuse, sex education, minority studies, and communication arts. I call this a 'no frills' school, and that's a beginning on character building all by itself."

"We are a very small school by ordinary junior high standards. Everyone in this school knows everyone else. The teachers know every kid by his or her first name. No student gets lost in the crowd at this school, as all too often happens in large junior highs. This makes it much more possible to teach solid citizenship, respect for others, and general good behavior."

"Most important," says Friedman, "we try to build character first and foremost *by example*. We have a very clear set of rules that *everyone* in the school follows. And by 'everyone' I mean just that -- students, all staff members, and myself. For instance, my assistant director and I stand in the hallway every morning when the kids come to school and say 'good morning' to every student using his or her first name. We expect every student to say 'good morning' back, and they do. And the teachers all behave the same way."

"We expect simple, common courtesy from everybody. If a student steps out of line with another student or a teacher, we expect the student to apologize. And if a teacher blows his cool in class, then we expect the teacher to apologize to the whole class. We also have a dress code of sorts for both teachers and students. All men teachers, for instance, must wear shirts and ties. We hold a school assembly every two weeks, and all the boys have to wear a white shirt and a tie and all the girls have to wear a white blouse and a skirt."

"We have a student handbook here that's nine pages long. It spells out in considerable detail all of the school's rules and regulations for students -- attendance; punctuality; being prepared each day for school with two pencils, one ballpoint pen, one looseleaf notebook, covered textbooks for each class, and all assigned homework done. We have general classroom behavior rules, including the expectation that all students will conduct themselves appropriately at all times. Fighting, cursing, yelling, or instigating fights are simply not tolerated."

"But -- getting back to the building character by example business -- we also have a staff handbook that spells out how all staff members are expected to behave. We always try to treat every child as a distinct human being worthy of respect, and if we don't, then we're not doing *our* job. We never ask the kids to do anything we don't do ourselves."

"In order to get into this school," Friedman continues, "you have to *want* to be here and you have to agree to abide by all of the rules. For instance, every student and parent must sign an agreement with us that they have read the student handbook and understand and agree to all of the rules. Parents have to agree to check all homework assignments and make sure that the student is

ready to come to school each day."

"What we are trying to do is to provide a quality education for average and below average kids. We try to get across to them what the pay-offs are for hard work and good behavior. In the first place, this means getting into a good high school -- one of the city's specialized high schools -- like Bronx High School of Science or Stuyvesant -- rather than the neighborhood high schools. In the second place, it can mean getting into college and ending up with a good, high-paying job and a better life. And this happens all the time around here. Our kids *do* get into good high schools, and many of our graduates are now in very good colleges."

"We want them to know that the future doesn't have to be what it looks like on the outside, that they can make a difference in their own lives. We want to instill a sense of personal pride and dignity in every child who comes here, a sense of self- responsibility for what they do and become."

* * *

In Eric Stofsky's seventh and eighth grade social studies and law class, some thirty students are sitting at desks facing the front of the room for a double period class of one and one-half hours. On the chalkboard is an outline of the lesson for the day (all classes in the school start with the lesson written out on the board in this fashion):

"Aim: to examine the First Amendment to the Constitution and its importance to a democratic society." Below are some of the objectives for that aim, such as "Define a law. List and describe three purposes of the law. What is the main feature of common law?"

Stofsky calls the class to order and refuses to begin the lesson until everyone is quiet and paying attention. After a few moments of squirming, the students settle into their chairs. Then he begins the lesson with a question: "What do you think of this school? Raise your hand and give me your opinion." Half the hands in the class go up. Students give some criticisms, and others agree or disagree by clapping.

Stofsky tells them that another opinion is that Ronald Reagan is the best president the United States has ever had. Students immediately jump in and discuss this opinion, pro and con. Stofsky asks, "Is it okay to criticize Reagan?"

Yes," says a student, "because we have freedom of speech!"

"That's right," says Stofsky. "I can say that and you can criticize this school because of the First Amendment to the Constitution which guarantees freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom of religion. There's also a fourth freedom the First Amendment guarantees. Does anyone know what it is?"

No one seems to know about the right to peaceable assembly, so Stofsky explains.

Photograph © Jane Menyawi

He goes on to ask if the rights guaranteed in the First Amendment are "absolute -- which means no exceptions." The class isn't sure. "Can we say anything we want any time we want to?" Stofsky then tells them about Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes and his statement that free speech has to be limited in some instances. "For instance, you can't falsely cry 'Fire!' in a crowded theater because it might cause a panic and people would be killed."

"In fact," says Stofsky, "you have a right to criticize Ronald Reagan but you don't have the right to get up in front of a crowd of people and say 'Let's kill Ronald Reagan' or 'Let's overthrow the government by force.'" As I look around the class, I'm not sure that all of the students agree with this.

The class discusses the right to vote and the need for people to know about the government and how it works, the offices they are voting for, and the candidates and their beliefs. This leads to a discussion of freedom of the press. Stofsky ends this part of class with remarks on "the free marketplace of ideas" and how the First Amendment is designed to ensure that people will be allowed to express a variety of ideas and to choose the ones they believe are best.

Along about now, which is halfway through the hour and a half, the students are getting a bit restless, so Stofsky calls a five minute break. The students get up and stretch and mill about, making considerable noise.

Stofsky begins the second half of the class by asking, "What would happen if we didn't have the First Amendment and other laws?" Students talk about the need for laws to provide order in society. Stofsky continues, "Right. So what we have here is a conflict between the need for the freedoms guaranteed by laws such as the First Amendment and the need for some kind of order, some kind of balance between the two. And that's what courts are for." The class discusses this topic, but the students are getting very restless. Stofsky has kept them at it for over an hour, and the wear and tear is beginning to show. Stofsky begins to lighten the discourse, including the wry question, "Do we have free speech here in this school? Does the First Amendment apply here in this class, for instance?"

As the class is going out, one of the students comes over to the desk where I am sitting, introduces herself (her name is Jessica), and asks me my name. I tell her and then ask, "What do you *really* think of this school?" She leans over conspiratorially and says in a low voice, "It's okay, but they give you too much out of books."

* * *

In another room, Sandra Rinaldo is conducting a ninth-grade class in career education entitled "Contemporary Problems and High School Articulation." The students are learning about themselves, their talents and abilities, so they can make a sensible choice about what high school (or high schools) they want to attend.

On the chalkboard is the stated aim of the class:

"Aim: How can I learn about my interests and abilities?"

The students are working in small groups on a "You and Your Abilities Inventory," a worksheet with separate headings such as "My Thinking Ability," and "Scientific Ability."

Rinaldo moves among the groups, helping individual students. Occasionally she stops and calls the attention of the whole class to a particularly knotty problem, reminding them that their job is to think long and hard about themselves and to try honestly to determine, as best they can, what their true abilities and interests are and what they want to make of themselves, what their aspirations are or could be.

* * *

Back at his office at the end of the school day, Friedman sits down at his desk, still smiling and still full of energy. "Maybe you can -- at least I hope you can -- see what we mean when we talk about building character and helping kids discover that they really can make it in this world, no matter how many problems they have and no matter how bleak the outlook may sometimes seem to them."

"I really do think," he concludes, "that we are providing something many of the parents in this district really want, something they really think they need for their children. I like to think of this place as a business. We have that kind of accountability. If we don't do a good job, if our kids don't succeed down the road, if they don't go to good high schools and on to college, then we're not doing our job and we shouldn't be in existence."

"But" -- he holds up two crossed fingers -- "so far, we seem to be doing okay."

PRACTITIONER'S CHECKLIST

Practitioners who want to determine whether a school is truly a back-to-basics, traditional school might ask the following questions as they visit the school. The items listed are hallmarks of a traditional school, and if you check "yes" or "somewhat" in most of these items, then the school qualifies as a traditional one.

PRACTITIONERS' CHECKLIST FOR TRADITIONAL SCHOOLS

	Yes	Somewhat	No
1. EDUCATIONAL AIMS			
a. Focuses on developing a broad understanding of the cultural heritage and values of Western civilization			
b. Stresses building individual character and morality and instilling a sense of right and wrong and a respect for American values			
2. CURRICULUM			
a. Emphasizes learning the basic skills			
b. Includes the traditional academic subjects of reading, writing, literature, mathematics, science, social studies, and the arts			
3. HOW TEACHERS TEACH AND CHILDREN LEARN			
a. Has self-contained classrooms with one teacher and about twenty-five children per room			
b. Has classes organized by age levels			
c. Has a schedule for all classes, with a designated time for each subject; most of the time is devoted to the basic subjects of reading, writing, and arithmetic			
d. Allows teachers to decide when and how subjects will be taught			
4. ORGANIZATION OF THE SCHOOL			
a. Has a controlled, well-organized atmosphere			
b. Has a student body that is quiet and well behaved both in class and while moving through the halls			
c. Has a clear code of student behavior that all students understand and follow			
d. Has rewards for good behavior and punishments for infractions of the school rules			
e. Evidences fair and impartial administration of the code of behavior			
5. HOW CHILDREN ARE GRADED			
a. Has frequently administered tests that are letter-graded on a bell-shaped curve			
b. Keeps parents informed about their children's academic and behavioral progress through regular letter-graded report cards and parent/teacher conferences			

IV

TRADITIONAL SCHOOLS WITH CURRICULAR SPECIALTIES

In addition to having a traditional academic curriculum, a traditional school of choice may offer an intensive and extended learning experience in one curricular area. A specialized school can emphasize science and technology, the fine and performing arts, or perhaps foreign languages or computer science, and so on.

However, it should be emphasized here that, at least in the case of elementary and junior high schools, these specialized schools are not vocational schools. That is, their main purpose is not to train students to become professional artists, musicians, scientists, mathematicians, or linguists in some future life. Rather, the main purpose is to ensure that a school system provides educational programs broad and diverse enough to fit the needs, interests, and abilities of the children. These specialized schools often give students a more interesting and satisfying school experience than what they would find in a school that attempts to touch all curricular bases equally.

But, first, the practitioners planning such a school must decide whether, as a public school of choice, the school will be traditional or nontraditional in structure. Then the staff or district can select a curricular specialty to emphasize within the school organization. New York City's Isaac Newton School for Science and Math, a specialized school described in this chapter, is organized and run as a traditional school, while Lowell's (MA) Arts Magnet (described in Book IV) is also a specialized school but with a nontraditional structure and teaching style.

The planning team must also decide whether the school will be selective in admissions (as in the case of Isaac Newton) or whether the school will be open to all students who apply (as at the Arts Magnet). In any situation where educational diversity and parent/professional choice are a means of providing desegregation and educational equity, selective admissions policies can cause major problems. Such practices can lead to minority/majority imbalances in either direction, depending upon the make-up of the district's student population. In situations where desegregation is one of the major goals, the most common response is to develop quotas for each racial and ethnic group (and for females) to ensure that every group has full access to all schools.

After these basic admissions decisions have been made, the practitioners can begin to determine how the school's curricular specialty will fit into the school's philosophy and organization and how it will be carried out. There are two basic ways to go about this. The first is the Isaac Newton approach: in order to allow time for specialization in an already crowded school day, the practitioners decided to give less time to other parts of the curriculum. In order to specialize in science and math, for instance, Newton does not offer music or art.

A second approach is favored by the Arts Magnet, as described in Book IV. That school uses the infusion method: material relating to the arts is included in the curricular material (and therefore the teaching) of all of the subjects taught in the school. This is a much more difficult and radical approach, since it

requires the creation of a quite new and different curriculum.

WHY PRACTITIONERS (AND/OR PARENTS) MIGHT CHOOSE THIS KIND OF SCHOOL

Practitioners will most likely wish to teach in these specialized schools because they themselves have a strong interest or special talent in the area of specialization. Parents (and students), on the other hand, are likely to be attracted to this kind of specialized schooling for a number of reasons, but in most cases because a child has given evidence of a strong interest and perhaps even an unusual talent in the field in which the school specializes. It is not unheard of, however, for parents to select such a school because of its general atmosphere, its reputation for being a good school, or because they feel it is important for children to be well grounded in the school's specialization.

ISAAC NEWTON SCHOOL FOR SCIENCE AND MATH COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT FOUR, NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The building in which Isaac Newton is housed is called the Manhattan Center for Math and Science. A huge pile of brick and stone overlooking the East River, it lies on the eastern edge of East Harlem. Until recently this forbidding monolith was the site of Benjamin Franklin High School, one of the city's neighborhood high schools and considered to be one of the worst. When Ben Franklin was closed down several years ago, the Manhattan Center became the home of several distinct schools -- Isaac Newton, the River East Elementary School (an alternative concept school specializing in math and science), and the Manhattan Center for Math and Science (one of the city's specialty high schools). Thus the Manhattan Center provides concentrated math and science learning from early childhood through grade twelve.

Isaac Newton is a small school of 240 students in grades seven and eight located in the north wing of the building's second floor. The school's space contains rows of typical, self-contained classrooms lining tiled corridors. Most of the classrooms have moveable desks and chairs, but in several rooms there are old-fashioned combination desks (with ink wells) and chairs lined up in strict rows and screwed to the floor.

Photograph © Jane Menyuk

The Isaac Newton is a highly academic and selective school; in order to be accepted, students must be reading two years above grade level, must have a strong character recommendation from their sixth-grade teacher, and must pass an examination. Both the students and their parents must demonstrate a commitment to the school's rigorous academic program and show some degree of genuine interest and accomplishment in science and math. Of the 400 to 500 students who apply each year, only 120 are accepted.

The students at this school are the cream of East Harlem's academic crop (or at least its *scientific* academic crop), and they are expected to do well and to go on to other academic successes. Almost all of them do: about 35 percent of the graduates attend highly

selective high schools such as Bronx High School of Science, 30 percent are admitted to the Manhattan Center next door, and 5 percent attend private schools. The school's director and the person who created the school is Leonard Bernstein. A tall, compact man with a crew cut of white hair, Bernstein was a science and math teacher for sixteen years in a junior high in neighboring District Five. He has taught in New York City schools for twenty-six years. He is also a well-known author of textbooks, a curriculum developer, and a consultant to many school districts throughout the country.

"When I was teaching in District Five," says Bernstein, "our kids were almost entirely low-level disadvantaged children, just like the kids here in District Four. But there was always a handful of very bright kids who got lost in the shuffle of the big junior highs. There was nothing being done for them in those big schools. One day I came over here to District Four and talked with Anthony Alvarado who was the district superintendent here (and who later became chancellor of the entire school system)."

"I told him I wanted to start a school for kids who were gifted in science and math. He said, 'Great!' and wangled my transfer to this district for the 1980-81 school year. I spent six months designing the school and its curriculum and recruiting teachers who, of course, are the key to everything. For instance, I had heard about a wonderful computer teacher in a junior high in Queens. His name is John Ferro. I went to visit him and told him about this school and what he could do in it. He decided to come, and he has turned out to be a real genius -- the most unselfish, giving individual I've ever known. I had that kind of latitude with picking all of the teachers. I didn't have to pay attention to seniority or union rules or anything like that. If you are going to do what you have to do in a school like this, you can't be selfish or put yourself or the UFT contract above the interests of the kids."

The curriculum at Newton is traditional and the academic expectations high. Every student takes the regular junior high program of English, a foreign language, social studies, mathematics, and science plus special courses in computer science, basic laboratory techniques, mechanical drawing, and advanced math for those interested. Virtually all students take ninth-grade math in eighth grade.

In order to have time to concentrate on the math and science courses, the school offers no music or art. "Students interested in those subjects," says Bernstein, "have schools here in the district that concentrate on those subjects. What we try to do here is not to teach everything but to teach what we teach and teach it well. And nobody -- not the State Department of Education or the district office -- hassles us because we teach what and how we believe is best."

"What we are trying to do here, the basic aim of this school," Bernstein continues, "is to get kids to think for themselves and to give them the equipment to do that. Just learning facts is not learning. Learning is learning how to understand basic principles and then use them to solve problems. Facts you can forget and forget easily. The application of a principle you never forget."

The school opened in September 1981, with sixty-seven seventh-grade students and five teachers, including Bernstein. The school was an instant success. It added an eighth grade the next year.

* * *

In John Ferro's seventh-grade computer science class, the students are being introduced not simply to computers but to the basic principles of computer programming. This class is of particular interest to me since, although I use a computer for writing pieces such as this, I have always been scared to death of programming and have shied away from learning anything about it.

This affliction does not infect the thirty students in Ferro's class. Perhaps this is because Ferro is starting at ground zero, right where they are and right where I am. Although the students are sitting at desks, on each of which is a computer, the machines are turned off and will not to be used in this lesson.

In the past Ferro, a lively, bearded man in his thirties, has begun his class by asking the students how they would go about planning a trip from East Harlem to San Francisco. The students have said the first thing they would do is to find a map. Ferro tells me he then asked them, "What kind of map? A map of Kansas City, Missouri?" No, the students answered, a map of the whole United States, one that included both New York City and California.

And then what? Well, the students decided that in order to make the trip, they would have to map out a very precise route from East 116th Street in New York City to San Francisco. Why? Because if they didn't, if they took a wrong turn in Kansas City, they would end up in Texas rather than in California.

Aha! says Ferro, they are now getting the basic idea of programming. A program is nothing more than a very carefully laid out route map for the computer to follow, a series of instructions telling a not too intelligent piece of electronic hardware the exact steps to follow in solving a problem (such as the problem of how to get from New York to San Francisco).

In this class, Ferro starts with the simple problem of how to convert temperature readings from Fahrenheit to Celsius or vice versa and how to tell the computer (or how to write a program instructing the computer) how to solve the problem. This requires converting the problem into a formula that contains all the necessary information the computer will need to solve the problem. It must also contain the desired final destination, i.e., the solution to the problem.

"Now," says Ferro, standing at the head of the class and using an overhead projector to write with, "what do we do first?" Several of the students make moves that suggest they are about to turn on their computers and get to work.

"Whoa!" says Ferro, "That is exactly what we *don't* do. You don't even know yet what you want the machine to do. So what do we do as our very first step?"

"We have to analyze the problem!" says one attentive young man.

"Right," says Ferro, "and how do we begin to do that?"

"We write out the formula!" says one student.

"Right," says Ferro. The students develop a formula and once more want to move to the computers. Ferro stops them, reminding them that they need to create a flow chart for their formula.

"Do we need a computer yet?" asks Ferro. "NO!" he says, "We're still in the thinking stage. Normal people like us have to think before we open our mouths. So we'll write this out on paper, too. What we have to do now is translate the flow chart into the BASIC language so that we'll know what to type into the computer to tell it what to do. And here's where we have to worry about every single detail, because if we miss one little detail, that's like taking a wrong turn at Kansas City."

Step by step, Ferro leads them through writing down the program on the overhead projector screen. At each step he makes the students describe what the step should be. He also makes them explain why that particular step is necessary and what would happen if it were omitted. Eventually, as the end of the class period nears, Ferro and the students have come up with a set of instructions (a genuine program) telling the computer how to solve the problem of converting Celsius to Fahrenheit and back again.

"There now," says Ferro, as the final period bell rings, "isn't that beautiful? Remember, you can write the best computer program in the world, but if nobody can understand it, if nobody can appreciate it, then it's useless. You've got to write programs for people."

As the students file out of the room, I can't swear that they have learned everything they were supposed to have learned, but at least *I* now understand something about programming and have lost some of my fear about getting involved with such arcane and scary stuff.

* * *

"As perhaps you can see," says Bernstein, "we are constantly learning here, constantly experimenting and trying to do what we do and do it better. That's part of the beauty of a school like this. We have that kind of latitude -- and, in fact, it's part of our mandate. Teachers can try new things whenever they want to. They can grow."

I ask him what he considers to be the essential ingredients in making a school like this -- or any school, for that matter -- work and succeed.

"Well," he says, after a moment or two of deep thought, "the first thing has to be a district administration that supports what you want to do and makes it possible, administrators who want a diversity of schools so that there is a school that fits every kid in this district, people who say to you, 'Go out and do it.' They have not only to encourage and support what you want to do but also to make it financially possible to create new schools.

"And, secondly, you have to have a person to be the director of the school, someone who is willing to take on this kind of a job and kill himself or herself doing it. Then you have to have teachers who still care about kids, teachers who are compassionate, knowledgeable, and energetic. And they have to want to come and teach in a school like this. So they also have to be volunteers, and the school has to be able to pick the ones that are best suited to that particular school. And, if necessary, you have to go out and recruit them, as I did in the case of John Ferro. This means you can't always follow the bureaucratic rules about who is a technically 'qualified' teacher. You find the best people and put them to work. You can't go around with a rule book in your back pocket all the time."

"And, by the way, let me say that giving teachers a chance to work in the schools they want to work in is one of the best antidotes to teacher burnout anyone could have invented. By giving them the freedom and the power to teach the way they want to teach, you make them real professionals. You also often make people who in the regular schools might be considered mediocre into first-rate teachers."

"And, lastly, you've got to have the support of the parents. Because they've been able to choose this school, we find our parents are very supportive of what we're trying to do, and that makes a big difference with the kids. Most of our parents just don't have the time to do a lot of things that usually go under the heading of 'parent involvement,' so we don't have a lot of that. But we do have enormous parent support, and that's the really important thing."

I ask Bernstein if all this means that Isaac Newton could be characterized as a school in which all of the people involved -- the director, the teachers, the parents, and the students -- have what is often called a shared sense of the school's mission, and that this is part of what makes the school work and makes it possible for the school to provide educational excellence.

Bernstein smiles. "Yes," he says after a moments thought, "I suppose you could say that. What we call it here is 'ownership by all.' And I'll have to say, too, that it really does work. In fact, I think it may be the only way we are ever going to get schools that really do work and are truly excellent."

V

HIGH SCHOOLS AND THE NEED FOR K-12 OPTIONS

"High schools exist not merely to subject students to brute training -- memorizing geometry theorems, dutifully showing up on time, learning how to mend an axle, reciting a passage from *Macbeth* -- but to develop their powers of thought, of taste and of judgment.

"I think the kind of rhetoric you find in the Governors' Report, and the report of the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, suggests policies much more congenial with what we are all about: the notion of variety and school site authority and experimentation."

-- Theodore R. Sizer, Chair, Department of Education, Brown University, quoted in Education Week, February 18, 1987.

All of the schools of choice described in this guide are elementary schools, junior highs, or, in some instances, K-8 schools. Each school offers a particular type of schooling and, in some cases, a curriculum that uniquely specializes in a particular subject matter. This raises one very serious question: what happens to students when they graduate from these diverse and unique schools and move on to high schools? And what happens to the ability of parents to continue to choose the kind of schooling their children will receive? Unfortunately, all too often parent and student choice disappears or is severely limited because the kind of choice described in these books is only offered up through the eighth grade.

The world of high school is a quite different universe from the one described in the previous chapters. In one sense, of course, there has traditionally been greater diversity at the high school level than in the lower grades. For many years there have been high schools that specialize in some particular type of curriculum. For example, academic (and usually highly selective) traditional high schools, such as Boston's two Latin Schools, have concentrated on preparing students who are deemed especially suitable for college and university admission. Selective high schools that specialize in one or more of the standard curricular areas, such as New York City's Bronx High School of Science and the High School of Performing Arts, have also been available, especially in large urban centers. At the other end of the spectrum, vocational schools specialize in preparing students for careers in the trades and technical areas. These two approaches constitute two very clear tracks that separate students and their paths to the future.

In between these extremes lies the typical high school called the comprehensive high school. These schools are called comprehensive because they are designed to serve all -- or at the very least most -- students of high school age through offering a variety of programs or tracks to accommodate different kinds of students. Most such schools will, for instance, offer a traditional academic program for the college-bound students, a general program for students who may be going on to some form of post-high school education but who may also be going directly to work, and a vocational type of program for students who will most likely be heading for the job market as soon as they graduate.

In this sense, then, a comprehensive high school does offer parents and students a choice. By the time a student reaches high school, however, the school system, not the parents, has decided on his or her placement. On the basis of students' records in elementary and junior high school, those who are not considered college material will be guided into the general or vocational track. In order to get into the college-bound track in many comprehensive high schools, students must have an academic record that justifies such admission in precisely the same way that students have to justify their admission to Boston Latin School or the Bronx High School of Science. Comprehensive high schools, thus, are very much in the business of sorting students, so that the element of choice by parents or students is severely limited.

Further, comprehensive high schools, by and large, do not offer any diversity of educational philosophies or any diversity in organization. In the typical comprehensive high school, for instance, all students are organized for home room purposes by age and grade (all ninth graders are grouped into ninth-grade homeroom classes, without regard to academic achievement levels). For instructional purposes, these schools are organized into departments by subject area. For instruction students are usually grouped homogeneously within each departmental area by age or grade and then by achievement, that is, grouped into tracks.

The teaching in most comprehensive high schools is usually conducted in self-contained classrooms with a single teacher teaching a specialized subject at the predetermined achievement level of the assigned students. While some classes will obviously involve students in hands-on activities -- the classes conducted in the science labs, the vocational shops, art and music spaces, the gym and playing fields, and so on -- the bulk of the academic teaching is conducted by teachers standing at the front of the class and talking to the students seated at their desks.

It is quite true, of course, that many schools of choice -- both magnet and alternative -- have been created at the high school level. But in most cases these schools have been created for their own reasons and purposes (i.e, to improve the range of possibilities at the high school level) without regard to what may be happening in the elementary schools. As elementary school parents and teachers are beginning to make abundantly clear, students who emerge from elementary and junior high schools of choice are finding that the high schools make no provision for or pay any attention to the kind of schooling they have received in the lower schools.

This is especially true for students who have attended nontraditional schools, such as Montessori, integrated day, or micro-society -- schools that encourage students to be active participants in their own education -- and for students who have attended the curricular specialty schools, such as those in the fine and performing arts or science and technology. When these students enter conventional comprehensive high schools, they find nothing that is remotely comparable to the experiences they have had in elementary and middle schools. In many cases, this has led to students -- many of them able and eager to learn -- who either drop out altogether or become in-school drop-outs, going through the motions but not engaged or enthusiastic about what they are being asked to do at the high school level.

RESTORING THE ESSENTIALS: THE SIZER REMEDIES

In recent years the most telling and profound criticism of the design and operation of the typical comprehensive high school has come from Theodore Sizer, chair of the Department of Education, Brown University, and his colleagues who have conducted a five-year study of the American high school. The results of this study are reported in several books, the most notable being Sizer's own Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School (Houghton Mifflin, 1986). Sizer and his colleagues make some devastating criticisms of our comprehensive high schools. These criticisms have also been made in other recent high school studies.

- These schools are far too big, often enrolling 1,500 to 2,000 students, which means that it is all too easy for individual students to get lost in the crowd.

- These schools, in an attempt to be all things to all students, offer a smorgasbord of courses, many of which have little intellectual content. Sizer and his colleagues call this "the shopping mall high school" and contend that such a wide range of often trivial choices wastes enormous amounts of student time and brainpower.

- Since the high school day is segmented into a series of fifty to fifty-five-minute classes in a wide variety of different subjects, students (and teachers) do not have the time to delve into any subject at any great depth or with any degree of intellectual intensity. Nor do the students have any way of putting all of these disparate pieces of knowledge together into a framework that might add up to a coherent vision of what they have learned.

- The most common style of teaching in these schools -- the instructional mode based on the idea that it is the teachers' job to pass knowledge from heads or from books into the heads of students -- makes the act of learning a tedious and intellectually uninspiring one for all too many students who are treated as passive recipients of knowledge.

For the teachers, Sizer says, life in these large comprehensive high schools is so professionally discouraging that it leads quickly to teacher burnout and to the public system's loss of many of our best teachers. In most of these schools teachers -- as much as the students -- are locked into a vast organizational machine over which they have virtually no control.

In addition, school periods are for the most part limited to fifty or fifty-five minutes, and this, says Sizer, means that very little can be accomplished in a single period. Given the time it takes for a class to get settled and under way and the time it takes to wind up and get students moving toward the next class, a teacher is fortunate to get in a half hour of solid teaching. Teachers simply do not have the time to explore any subject in depth and thus end up shortchanging both the students and themselves.

The remedies that Sizer and his cohorts propose to correct this situation stem from one basic recommendation: dismantle the comprehensive high school. This remedy would also fit in with choice concepts. To replace the comprehensive model, Sizer makes (among many others) the following proposals:

- Large high schools would be broken into smaller subunits of no more than 400 or 500 students.

- The number of courses should be radically reduced to concentrate on the essential subjects -- English, math, social studies, science. Because of this emphasis on the essentials, these new high schools have been dubbed "essential schools."

- Essential subjects would be taught in longer periods, at least double the present time allotments, so that students and teachers have time to

explore the subject matter in depth and at length.

- Both the size of classes and the number of students any teacher is required to deal with in the course of a school day should also be radically reduced to a maximum of perhaps eighty students, so that teachers can get to know the students personally and give them the kind of attention and help they need.

- Students would take charge of their own learning with the teachers acting more as coaches, guiding students but not getting in the way of students who are themselves engaged in learning.

- Teachers would have the primary responsibility, working in concert with their principals, to determine what will be taught and how it will be presented. It is, after, all the teachers who are on the firing line and who know what is going on with students and what will benefit the students most.

- No single pattern, no single curriculum, no single set of courses will be equally suitable for all teachers to teach and all students to learn, although all schools will be concentrating on the essential subjects. Individual essential high schools will, therefore, differ in what they offer and in the way they offer it.

RESTRUCTURING HIGH SCHOOLS FOR CHOICE: OTHER MODELS

Several other proposals in recent years have suggested new ways to remake high schools so as to diminish the size of the basic units and enhance individual student attention and instruction. John Goodlad has suggested that schools within schools be created. A high school is divided into "houses" of 500 or fewer students. Each house has its own curriculum, students, faculty and counselors. Students can make choices about the house they are enrolled in.

Another method that has been put into practice in Massachusetts is called the Copernican Plan. In it students take courses that are more intensive and in shorter time segments -- of thirty days, trimesters or some combination thereof. Students then spend a large segment of their day on one course with one teacher. They are also given some choice about the courses they attend.

A third approach is to convert the existing school into sub-schools or houses with each house related to an elementary school of choice. In the case of a 2,000 student comprehensive school, four 500 student sub-schools could be created, one a traditional back-to-basics school, a second devoted to a continuous progress approach, one to a continuation of the arts option and one to a micro-society option. Each, of course, would not only be nonselective, but would represent the total spectrum of students served by the school.

STEPS IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION: MOVING TOWARD K-12 OPTIONS

The adoption of these concepts of smaller schools with more diverse learning styles, curriculum, and organization would lead to a new kind of high school, one that would enable parents and students to have the kind of school experience they want from elementary school through high school. The school system of Buffalo, New York, is an example of one that has been moving rapidly away from uniformity in its secondary schools and toward choice and diversity from kindergarten through grade twelve. This has happened because parents and teachers in the lower schools have strongly advocated an extension of the magnet

schools and schools of choice that exist for elementary grades (and also because Superintendent Eugene Reville and the Board of Education recognized that the idea makes enormous educational sense).

Buffalo has a citywide, back-to-basics kindergarten-through-grade-eight magnet school called Campus East. Parents at Campus East have been concerned about their children's high school selection for a number of years. They wanted them to attend a nonselective high school based on the same educational philosophy and approach as the one in practice at Campus East. So the Buffalo school district created a nonselective, citywide magnet high school that precisely fits this bill: Buffalo Traditional High School.

Because of the success of this high school, Buffalo is beginning to move towards what will be a complete kindergarten-through-grade-twelve system of diversity and choice. Each of the elementary school options will have a high school continuation, either through the creation of brand new high schools or the conversion of existing comprehensive high schools to particular options. For instance, in addition to expanding the back-to-basics option, two new high schools are currently being planned jointly with Buffalo State University, one devoted to science and therefore a continuation of the K-8 Science Magnet, the other a continuation of the nontraditional schools such as Montessori and the open or developmental options.

Building on the success of elementary and middle school of choice, school districts will begin to develop a system that will allow parents and students to choose the method of schooling that best suits their needs and abilities from kindergarten-through-grade-twelve. In urban areas, such as Buffalo, this may take the form of establishing high schools of choice. In smaller school systems, the existing comprehensive high school may be divided into sub-schools, thus providing students with schools of choice at the high school level.

INDEX

A
African-American, 9, 14
Arts Magnet, 22
Asian-American, 9, 14

B
Boston Latin School, 28
Boston Public Schools, 8, 10
Bridge Alternative Concept School, 13, 16
Brown University, 28, 29
Bronx High School of Science, 20, 23, 28
Burncoat Preparatory Magnet School, 12
Buffalo Public Schools, 3, 32

C
Cambridge Public Schools, i
Campus East, 32
Community School District Four, 13, 14, 23, 28
Comprehensive high schools, 28-30, 31, 32
Controlled Choice, i
Copernican Plan, 31

D
Desegregation, i, ii, 2

E
Effective schools, 2-3
Essential schools, 28, 30

F
Fall River Public Schools, i

G
Gardner, Howard, 2
Goodlad, John, 31

H
High School of Performing Arts, 28
Hispanic American, 9, 14

I
Integrated day school, 1, 29
Isaac Newton School for Science, 22, 23-24

L
Lowell Arts Magnet, 22
Lowell Public Schools, i

M
Micro-society school, 29
Montessori school, 1, 29, 32

N
Nathan Hale Magnet School, 8-9
Native American, 9
New York City, iii, 13, 14, 23, 24

S
Sizer, Theodore, 29, 31

T
Traditional school, 1-5, 6-7, 8, 9, 12, 12, 19, 20, 22

V
Vocational school, 28

W
Worcester (MA) Public Schools 12

PLANNING FOR SCHOOLS OF CHOICE: ACHIEVING EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE

A four book series on intradistrict controlled choice. The three other books cover the following topics:

Book I. Rationale.

This book defines controlled choice and its key elements. It shows how controlled choice can lead to the empowerment of parents, teachers and principals to improve schools, and foster both desegregation and greater educational achievement. It features a description of some of the pitfalls of a choice system that will help school leaders to establish new school structures in an effective and successful way.

Book II. Planning Guide.

This book is a guide to planning for system-wide controlled choice in which mechanisms for the creation of such a plan include citywide parent/professional/community council, citywide parent survey, parent information centers and new enrollment methods. Also described in detail is the means by which each building is remodeled into a school of choice.

Book IV. Model Schools: Nontraditional Structure

This description of nontraditional schools of choice features schools that are organized around such nontraditional methods as the Montessori method, continuous progress, and also schools that feature unusual curricular specialties, such as micro-society school. Here, too, a practitioner's checklist is provided to help school personnel identify the key elements in a nontraditional school structure. This book also looks at new methods of shared governance practiced by some of these schools.

Each book is $10.00; a complete set of 4 books is $30.00.

You may order them from:

PUBLICATIONS DEPARTMENT
The NETWORK, Inc.
300 Brickstone Square, Suite 900
Andover, Massachusetts 01810
(508) 470-1080

The NETWORK Inc.

New England Center for Equity Assistance
290 South Main Street
Andover, Massachusetts 01810
800-225-7931 (toll free number)
800-322-1030 (Massachusetts only)
508-470-1080

BEST COPY AVAILABLE